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MONSTER HUNTERS
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CHARLTON PUBLICATION
MONSTER HUNTERS
GARRR!
SOMEBODY, HELP ME!
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I LEARNED OF THIS RATHER INTERESTING INCIDENT WHILE I WAS LUNCHING IN TRAFALGAR WITH A CHAP WHO WAS AT OXFORD WHILE I WAS THERE. THIS FELLOW, RATHER A DECENT BLOKE, HAD BECOME SOME SORT OF SCIENTIST... AN ANTHROPOLOGIST, IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY. AT ANY RATE, I HADN'T SEEN HIM IN YEARS, Y'SEE, AND WAS JUST OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, STILL USING A CANE. I ASKED HIM HOW THE INJURIES OCCURRED AND HE TOLD ME THIS RATHER INCREDIBLE TALE WHICH I HEREBY PASS ALONG TO YOU... NOT THAT I EXPECT YOU TO BELIEVE IT.
STORY: J. GILL ART: MARTI
IT BEGAN WHEN HE, DR. HOBART FIELDS, DISCOVERED A HIGHLY INTELLIGENT SPECIES OF ANTHROPOID APE ON AN ISLAND OFF THE EAST COAST OF AFRICA. DR. FIELDS ESTABLISHED A RESEARCH LABORATORY THERE.
DAD, ARE YOU CERTAIN IT WAS AN ACCIDENT WHEN LESTER BEAT YOU AT CHECKERS YESTERDAY?
NOT REALLY, ANGELA. LESTER IS FLUENT IN THE SIGN LANGUAGE WE'VE TAUGHT HIM. I SAW HIM YESTERDAY TEACHING IT TO LIZZIE.
THE DICTATOR
D 7302

MONSTER HUNTERS Vol. 4, No. 17, December, 1978,
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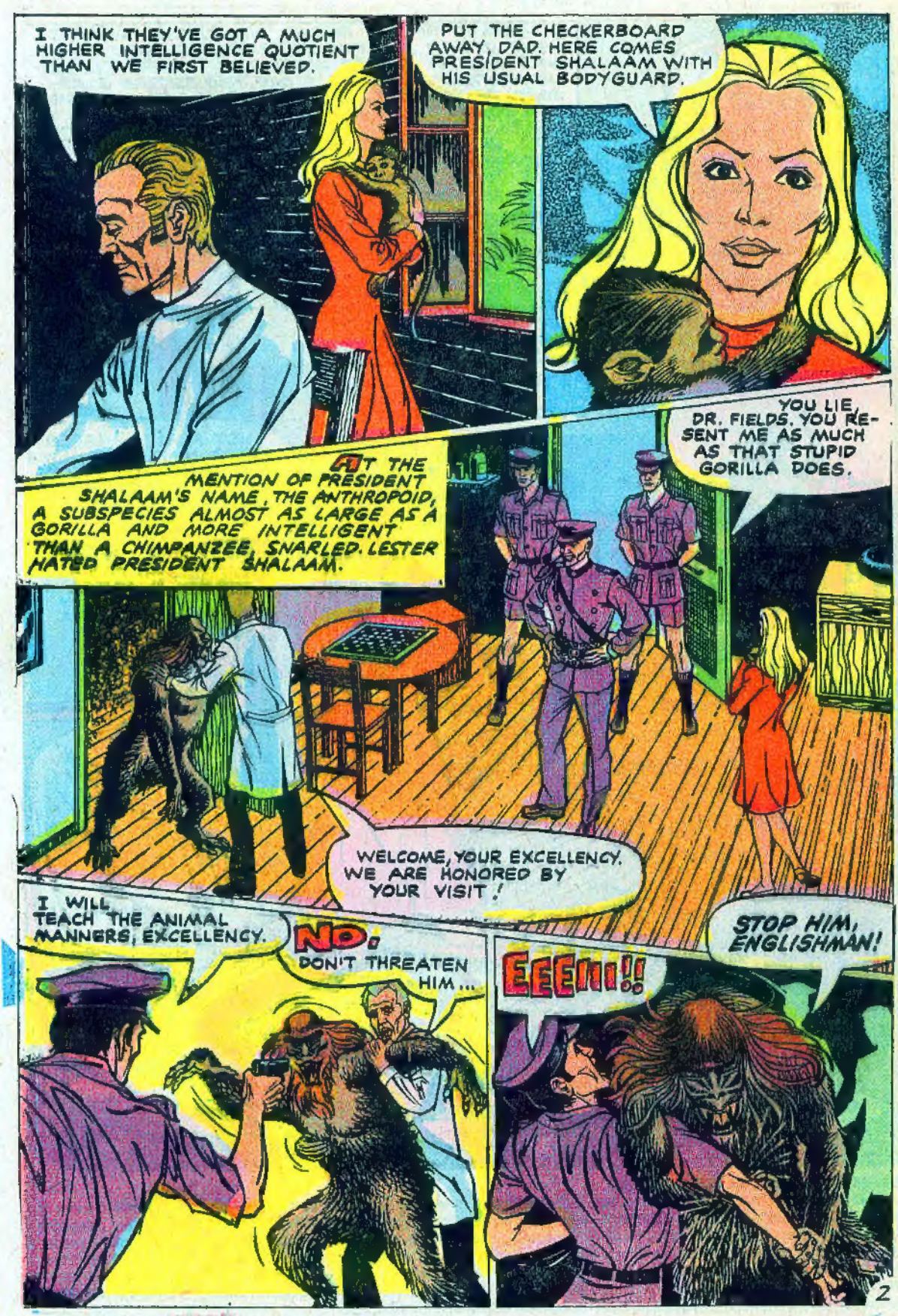
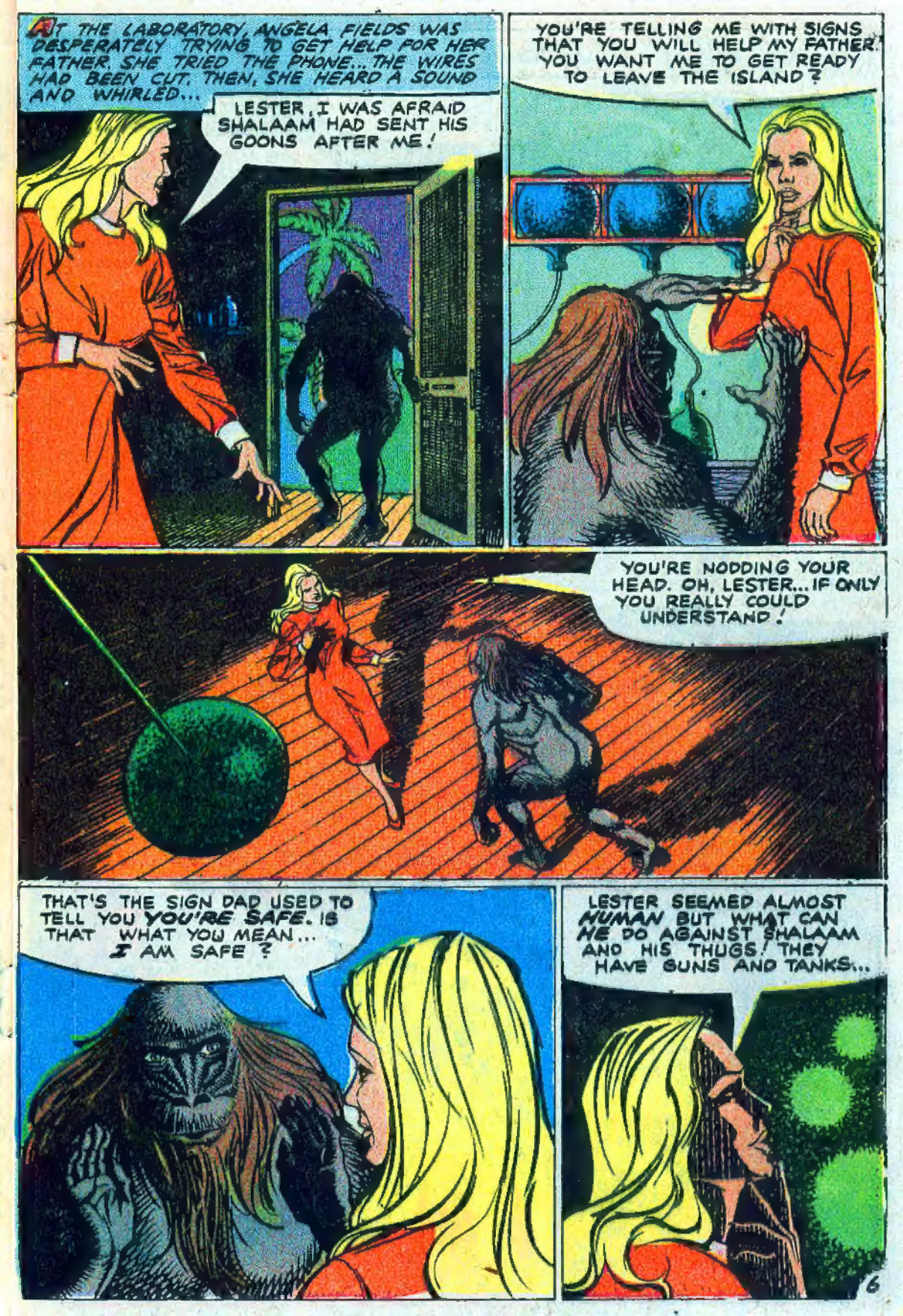

I THINK THEY'VE GOT A MUCH HIGHER INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT THAN WE FIRST BELIEVED.
PUT THE CHECKERBOARD AWAY, DAD. HERE COMES PRESIDENT SHALAAM WITH HIS USUAL BODYGUARD.
AT THE MENTION OF PRESIDENT SHALAAM'S NAME, THE ANTHROPOID, A SUBSPECIES ALMOST AS LARGE AS A GORILLA AND MORE INTELLIGENT THAN A CHIMPANZEE, SNARLED. LESTER HATED PRESIDENT SHALAAM.
YOU LIE, DR. FIELDS. YOU RESENT ME AS MUCH AS THAT STUPID GORILLA DOES.
WELCOME, YOUR EXCELLENCY. WE ARE HONORED BY YOUR VISIT!
I WILL TEACH THE ANIMAL MANNERS, EXCELLENCY.
NO. DON'T THREATEN HIM...
EEEn!!
STOP HIM, ENGLISHMAN!

RUN, LESTER... HIDE IN THE TREES!
ONE SIDE, YOU FOOL... I'LL KILL THAT MONSTER.
GIVE ME THE YOUNG ONE. I...
LET HIM ALONE!
PRESIDENT SHALAAM DISLIKES THESE ANIMALS. HE HAS ISSUED AN ORDER TO DESTROY EVERY ONE OF THEM!
THEY ARE DANGEROUS! I WILL HAVE THEM EXTERMINATED!

SUDDENLY, THE SECOND ANTHROPOID WAS LEAPING FROM THE BROKEN WINDOW AND LUMBERING TOWARD THE FOREST...
YOU ARE UNDER ARREST, DR. FIELDS!
THESE APES HAVE BEEN A MENACE TO MY PEOPLE EVER SINCE WE CAME HERE FROM THE MAINLAND YEARS AGO. WE HAD TO DESTROY MANY AND THE OTHERS FLED INTO THE DEEP FOREST. SINCE YOU CAME, THEY ARE CAUSING TROUBLE ONCE AGAIN.
YOU POMPOUS FOOL... MY EXPERIMENTS HAVE PROVED THESE CREATURES ARE CAPABLE OF INTELLIGENT THOUGHT PROCESSES, AND COMMUNICATING BY SIGN LANGUAGE.
IT IS AS I SAID... THEY ARE DANGEROUS AND I SHALL WIPE THEM OUT!
YOU HAVE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO LEAVE, MISS FIELDS. AFTER THAT, I WILL BURN THIS LABORATORY AND DESTROY YOUR ANIMALS.
I'LL GO TO THE BRITISH CONSULATE! YOU CAN'T...
THE BRITISH CONSUL IS GONE. I SENT HIM AWAY.
4

CONTINUED AFTER FOLLOWING PAGE

THE MOST HIGHLY DEVELOPED OF THE SIMIANS WITH WHICH DR. FIELDS HAD WORKED WAS LESTER...THIS POWERFUL MALE LUMBERED THROUGH THE FOREST, SNARLING AND GROWLING UNTIL...
IT WAS AN EERIE SIGHT! DR. FIELDS HAD TAUGHT LESTER AND HALF A DOZEN OTHER APES A SOPHISTICATED SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATING BY 'SIGN LANGUAGE! THE OTHER GREAT APES HAD LEARNED FROM THEM.!
LESTER TURNED...HE SENT THE MOTHERS WITH THEIR YOUNG TO THEIR LAIRS IN THE CLIFF! MALES AND HEALTHY YOUNG FEMALES GATHERED AROUND, WATCHING HIS SWIFT HANDS, READING HIS SIGNS.
THEY FOLLOWED LESTER ...THEN... LIKE THEIR LEADER, THEY WERE ANGRY.
5


AT THE LABORATORY, ANGELA FIELDS WAS DESPERATELY TRYING TO GET HELP FOR HER FATHER. SHE TRIED THE PHONE... THE WIRES HAD BEEN CUT. THEN, SHE HEARD A SOUND AND WHIRLED...
LESTER, I WAS AFRAID SHALAAM HAD SENT HIS GOONS AFTER ME!
YOU'RE TELLING ME WITH SIGNS THAT YOU WILL HELP MY FATHER. YOU WANT ME TO GET READY TO LEAVE THE ISLAND?
YOU'RE NODDING YOUR HEAD. OH, LESTER... IF ONLY YOU REALLY COULD UNDERSTAND!
THAT'S THE SIGN DAD USED TO TELL YOU YOU'RE SAFE. IS THAT WHAT YOU MEAN... I AM SAFE?
LESTER SEEMED ALMOST HUMAN BUT WHAT CAN HE DO AGAINST SHALAAM AND HIS THUGS! THEY HAVE GUNS AND TANKS...
6

IN THE ONLY CITY ON THE SMALL ISLAND, PRESIDENT SHALAAM'S PALACE LOOMED ABOVE THE FLIMSY WOODEN BUILDINGS.
I WANT EVERY APE ON THIS ISLAND KILLED! WIPE THEM OUT!
WE HAVE MODERN WEAPONS, EXCELLENCY! IT WILL BE EASY!
THE ANTHROPOIDS... ABOUT FIFTY OF THEM... FOLLOWED LESTER THROUGH THE FOREST! THEY MOVED WITH PURPOSE... STRANGELY WELL DISCIPLINED FOR A HERD OF ANIMALS.
IT IS ONE OF THEM! THE WALKING BEASTS!
BOOK AT LESTER... HE SEEMED TO RECOGNIZE THE TRAP AND NOW LOOKED AT A COUNTER-WEAPON.
7

MOST BEASTS ARE AFRAID OF FIRE...LESTER LIT TORCHES FROM THE NATIVE COOK FIRE AND GAVE IT TO ONE OF HIS FELLOWS...
THEN, THIS STRANGE ARMY MARCHED ON PRESIDENT SHALAAM'S CAPITAL...
THE APES HAVE TORCHES ... THEY'RE ATTACKING THE CITY! RUN!
THE DICTATOR BARRICADED HIMSELF IN HIS PALACE! HE HAD GUARDS AND GUNS... BUT THEY DIDN'T HELP WHEN LESTER CAME!
AAARGHH!
NO! PLEASE...TAKE WHAT YOU WANT ...THIS IS STUPID! HE CAN'T UNDERSTAND
8

SHALAAM HAS HIS YACHT AT THE DOCK... HE WON'T LEAVE ME BEHIND!
THE CITY BURNED...AND THE PEOPLE FLED IN FISHING BOATS AND COASTAL STEAMERS. AS THEY RAN, THE APES WATCHED...
AT THE PRISON, LESTER AMAZINGLY FOUND DR. FIELDS. ANGELA, HIS DAUGHTER WAS THERE...
QUICKLY OR THEY WILL KILL US!
LESTER AND THE OTHER SIMIANS FRIGHTENED SHALAAM AND ALL THE OTHER PEOPLE AWAY, DAD! NOW, IF I COULD FIND THE KEY!
THANKS, OLD FRIEND...ANGELA, I THINK WE'D BETTER LEAVE TOO! THIS IS THEIR ISLAND. WE'RE IN THEIR WAY NOW.
THEY ARE JUST WATCHING...THEY ARE NOT AS BAD AS SHALAAM'S THUGS!
LESTER MADE A SIGN, ANGELA ...HE DOESN'T NEED A KEY.
WE PROVIDED THEM WITH A KEY...NOW, THEY CAN COMMUNICATE...THEY CAN POOL THEIR KNOWLEDGE ...WHO KNOWS? SOME DAY THEY MAY DEVELOP FAR MORE THAN PEOPLE EXRECT.
DAD, WILL THEY REMEMBER WHAT YOU TAUGHT THEM?
END

THE RESIDENTS OF THE CONCRETE-AND-STEEL ISLAND CALLED MANHATTAN LIVE UNDER CONSTANT PRESSURES AND FEARS... THE PRESSURES OF LIFE AND THE FEAR OF DEATH. MOST OF THE PEOPLE GO FROM DAY TO DAY UNDER THE PROTECTIVE CLOUD OF 'IT'LL NEVER HAPPEN TO ME!' ONE MARY GRANT, SECRETARY FOR A NEW YORK LAW FIRM, HID BENEATH THAT PARTICULAR CLOUD FOR ALL OF HER TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS...

STORY: TOM TUNA

TONIGHT IT RAINED! AND MARY GRANT HAS FALLEN VICTIM TO HER GREATEST FEAR: DEATH BY VIOLENCE. A DEATH ALL MANHATTANITES HAVE COME TO CALL --- VAMPIRISM!

BELIEF in VAMPIRES

MARY GRANT DOES NOT HEAR THE SQUEAL OF TIRES HERALDING THE ARRIVAL OF THE TOO-LATE PATROL CARS... OR THE MUFFLED CURSES OF THE NERVOUS POLICEMEN WITHIN. COPS HAVE BEEN THIS ROUTE BEFORE!

RRRRRR

D-6944

ONE OF THEM BEING A CERTAIN DETECTIVE/LIEUTENANT JOE COLLINS...

O.K., BOYS, YOU SHOULD ALL KNOW THE PROCEDURE BY NOW!

PETE, YOU LOOK AROUND AND TRY TO FIND OUR 'MYSTERY INFORMANT'... WHOEVER HE IS...

CONTINUED AFTER FOLLOWING PAGE

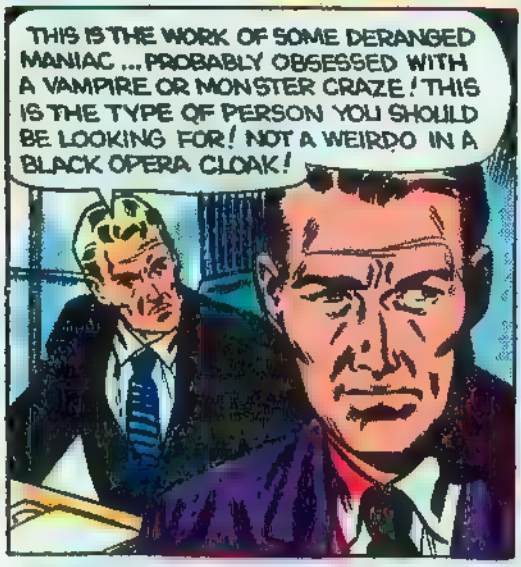
HE SURE WAS RIGHT! THERE SHE IS!
AND HERE ARE THE HOLES, JOE! RIGHT WHERE THEY WERE ON THE OTHERS!
COME ON, OFFICER! DON'T TELL ME YOU BELIEVE ALL THAT HOGWASH THAT'S BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THESE KILLINGS!
HEY!! WHO'S THAT!?
OH, IT'S JUST YOU, KING! YOU DUMB NEWSHOUND! WHY DON'T YOU QUIT SNEAKIN' AROUND?!
SORRY ABOUT THAT, JOE! DIDN'T MEAN TO STARTLE YOUR MEN!
STARTLE MY MEN? I DON'T THINK ANYTHING COULD DO THAT AFTER THIS PAST WEEK!
SO THIS IS ANOTHER OF THOSE SUPPOSED 'VAMPIRE' SLAYINGS? THEY HAVE YOU SPOOKED, TOO?
NO... I CAN'T SWALLOW THAT OLD 'COUNT DRACULA' LINE MYSELF, BUT... WELL, SOME OF THESE GUYS...
YEAH, I KNOW! THEY SEE THE VICTIMS WITH TEETH MARKS IN THEIR NECKS... AND ALWAYS AT NIGHT, HUH?
FUBAR
2

ALWAYS AT NIGHT. THE DEAD OF NIGHT.
WELL, DONT WORRY ABOUT MY PAPER, JOE. I'M NOT GOING TO FALL INTO LINE WITH THE 'SENSATIONALISTS.' THE MAN, NOT VAMPIRE WHO'S COMMITTING THESE LOCO MURDERS..
YEAH, FINE. JUST ONE THING, KING.. HOW'D YOU COME TO BE ON THE SCENE SO FAST?
ONLY THREE PEOPLE COULD HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE US... THAT POOR GAL, THE TIPSTER WHO CALLED US ...AND THE KILLER!
WHAT?
TURKE
OH, COME ON, JOE! DO I LOOK LIKE A 'VAMPIRE'? TELL YOU WHAT, THOUGH. IF YOU'RE A GOOD BOY, I'LL LET YOU WORK WITH ME TRACKING DOWN THE REAL MURDERER. SEE YOU IN THE FUNNY PAPERS, JOE!
FOR LONG MOMENTS AFTER THE REPORTER HAS GONE, THE VETERAN SLEUTH STANDS AND STARES INTO THE DARKNESS... HE RECALLS THE PARTING LOOK ON CHRISTOPHER KING'S FACE...
...AND HE SHUDDERS IN THE WARM SPRING AIR...

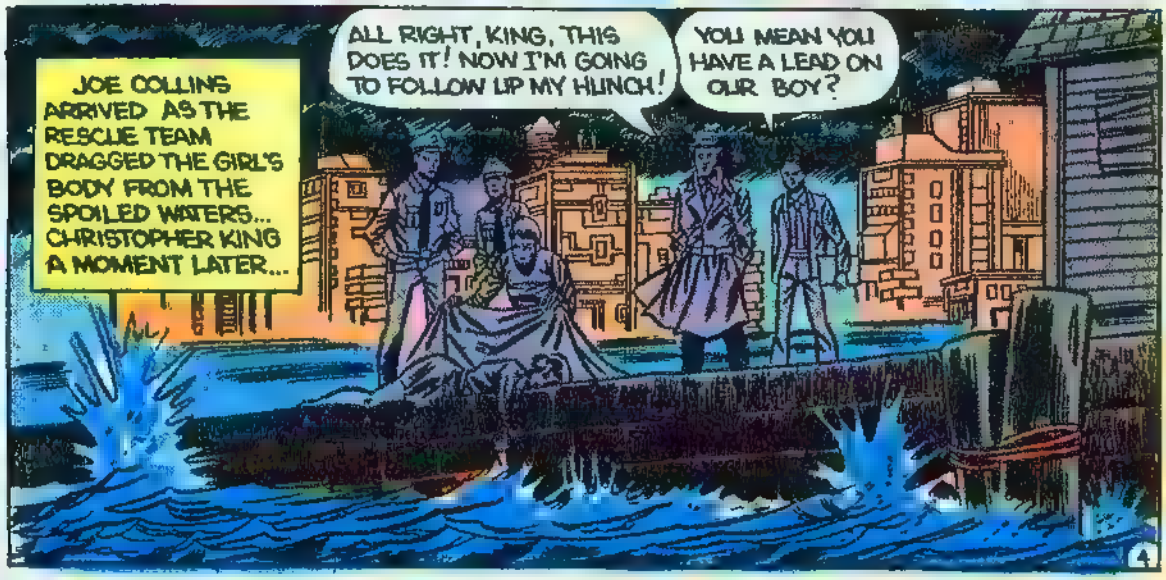
CONTINUED AFTER FOLLOWING PAGE

IN THE FRIGHT-FILLED DAYS AND NIGHTS THAT FOLLOWED KING, THE REPORTER, AND COLLINS, THE DETECTIVE, PURSUE THE EERIE KILLINGS... EACH IN HIS OWN FASHION... KING, THROUGH HIS HARD-HITTING, PRACTICAL COLUMNS...

...COLLINS THROUGH DETERMINED POLICE WORK...

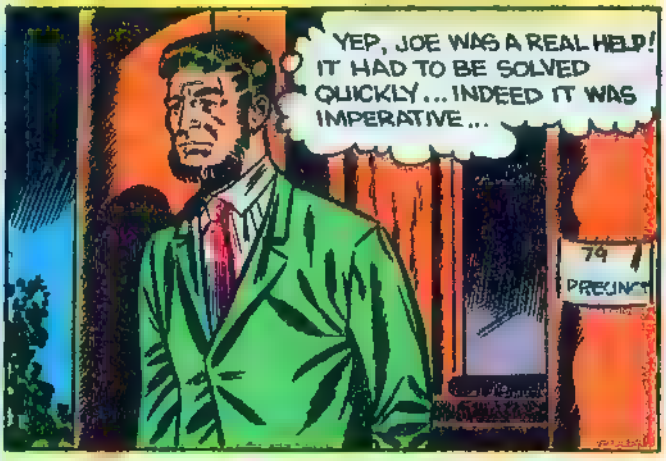

THIS IS THE WORK OF SOME DERANGED MANIAC ... PROBABLY OBSESSED WITH A VAMPIRE OR MONSTER CRAZE! THIS IS THE TYPE OF PERSON YOU SHOULD BE LOOKING FOR! NOT A WEIRDO IN A BLACK OPERA CLOAK!

THEY FOUND A GIRL IN THE EAST RIVER NOT TEN MINUTES AGO! THOUGHT YOU'D WANNA KNOW!
HOW'S THAT?
SHE'D LOST A LOT OF BLOOD... THROUGH THE HOLES IN HER NECK!

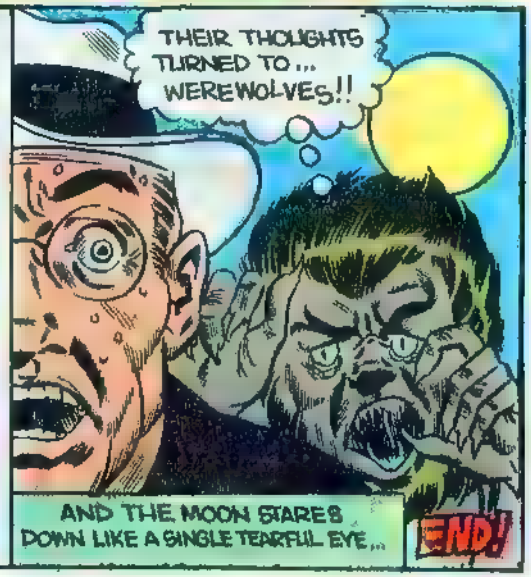

JOE COLLINS ARRIVED AS THE RESCUE TEAM DRAGGED THE GIRL'S BODY FROM THE SPOILED WATERS... CHRISTOPHER KING A MOMENT LATER...
ALL RIGHT, KING, THIS DOES IT! NOW I'M GOING TO FOLLOW UP MY HUNCH!
YOU MEAN YOU HAVE A LEAD ON OUR BOY?

NO...JUST A FAR-OUT IDEA... GET IN AND GET RID OF THAT RAG!
O.K. JOE! I'M WITH YOU!
VAMPIRE FIEND STUMPS POLICE
THE BOWERY: THE FINAL STOP FOR MANY PURPOSELESS LIVES... AND FOR THE SEARCH FOR A FIEND!
WE'VE HAD SOME REPORTS OF AN OLD WEIRD WINO HANGING AROUND... I'M NOT SURE IF HE'LL BE NEARBY, BUT IF YOU HAVE A BETTER IDEA...
NOT ME, JOE!
LOOK! THAT'S HIM! I'M SURE OF IT!
I GUESS MOST DETECTIVE WORK IS DUMB LUCK, HUH COLLINS?
NO COMMENT, KING! I'M JUST GLAD I REMEMBERED THAT GUY FROM OUR FILES!
LET'S GET TO HIM BEFORE THAT GAL BECOMES A STATISTIC!

LATER THAT EVENING, A DELIGHTED CHRISTOPHER KING STROLLS AWAY FROM A LOCAL POLICE PRECINCT-THE PRECINCT NOW HOUSING THE DERANGED 'VAMPIRE FIEND'...



...THAT THIS CASE BE SOLVED IN A HURRY... AND FORGOTTEN. BECAUSE AFTER ALL, IF PEOPLE WERE LEFT TO BELIEVE IN VAMPIRES HOW LONG WOULD IT BE BEFORE ...

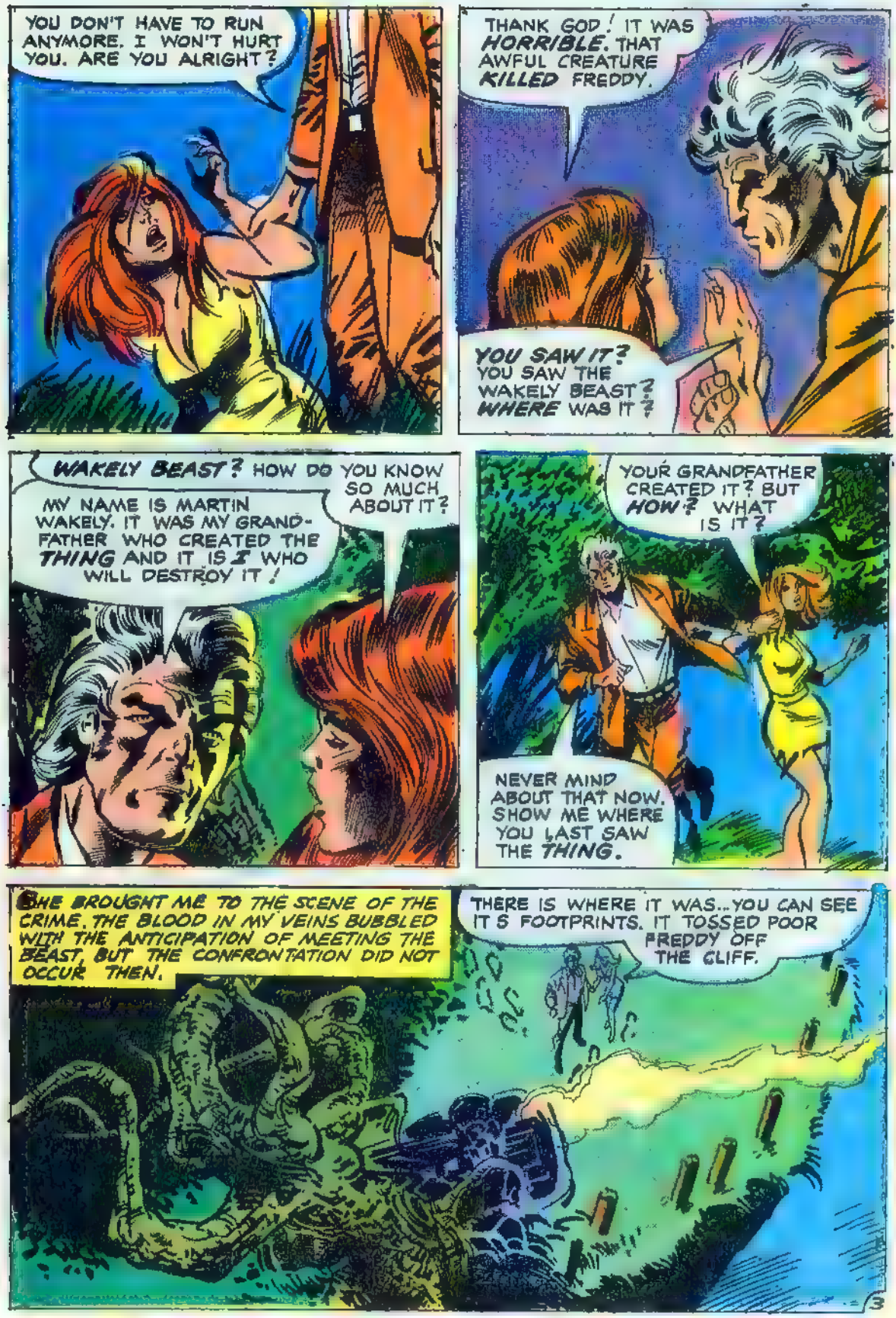


MARTIN WAKELY HAS HONORED US WITH A FIRST HAND ACCOUNT OF HIS HUNT FOR..
THE WAKELY MONSTER
MY NAME IS MARTIN WAKELY AND THIS IS A STORY ABOUT A CURSED BEAST- A SOULLESS THING- THAT HAS PREYED UPON MY FAMILY UNTIL NONE WERE LEFT TO TELL THE TALE BUT ME!
I'M GLAD THAT YOU BROUGHT ME OUT HERE, FREDDY. THE MOON IS BEAUTIFUL!
NOT AS BEAUTIFUL AS YOU... HEY, DID YOU HEAR SOMETHING IN THE WOODS? IT SOUNDED LIKE HEAVY BREATHING.
CARR
AIIII!
WHAT IS IT?
GRRRR
YI
STORY SYNOPSIS

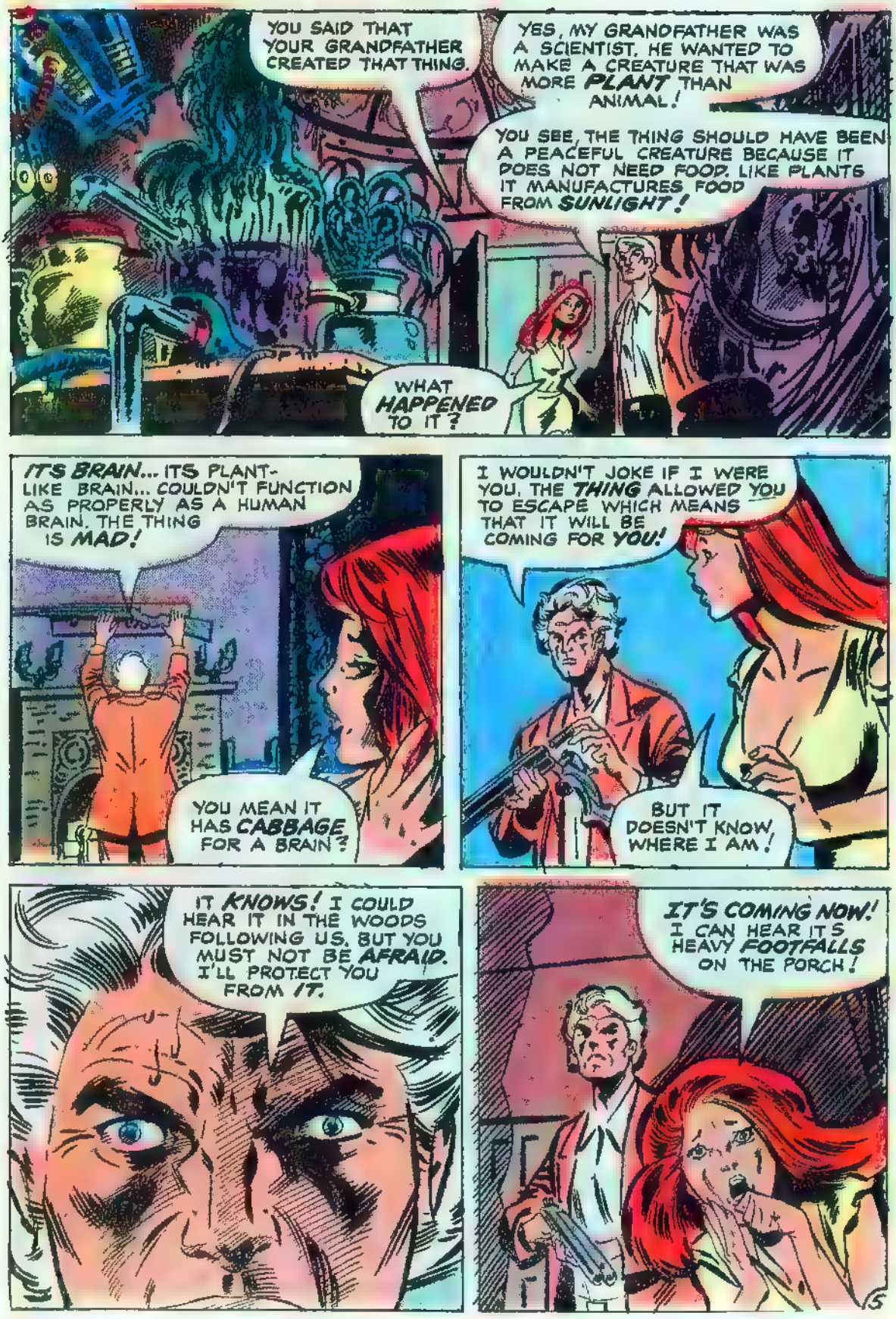
CONTINUED AFTER THE NEXT TWO PAGES

THE TERROR THAT THE GIRL FELT, MUST HAVE BEEN NEARLY PARALYZING. SHE RAN BUT HER LEGS SEEMED TO TAKE HER NOWHERE. HER SCREAM SHATTERED ONLY THE THOUGHTS IN HER MIND AND THE BRANCHES OF THE BUSHES SNAPPED AND CUT AT HER.

THEN, HORROR OF HORRORS, SHE FELL AND KNEW THAT ESCAPE FROM THE MERCILESS THING WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE.

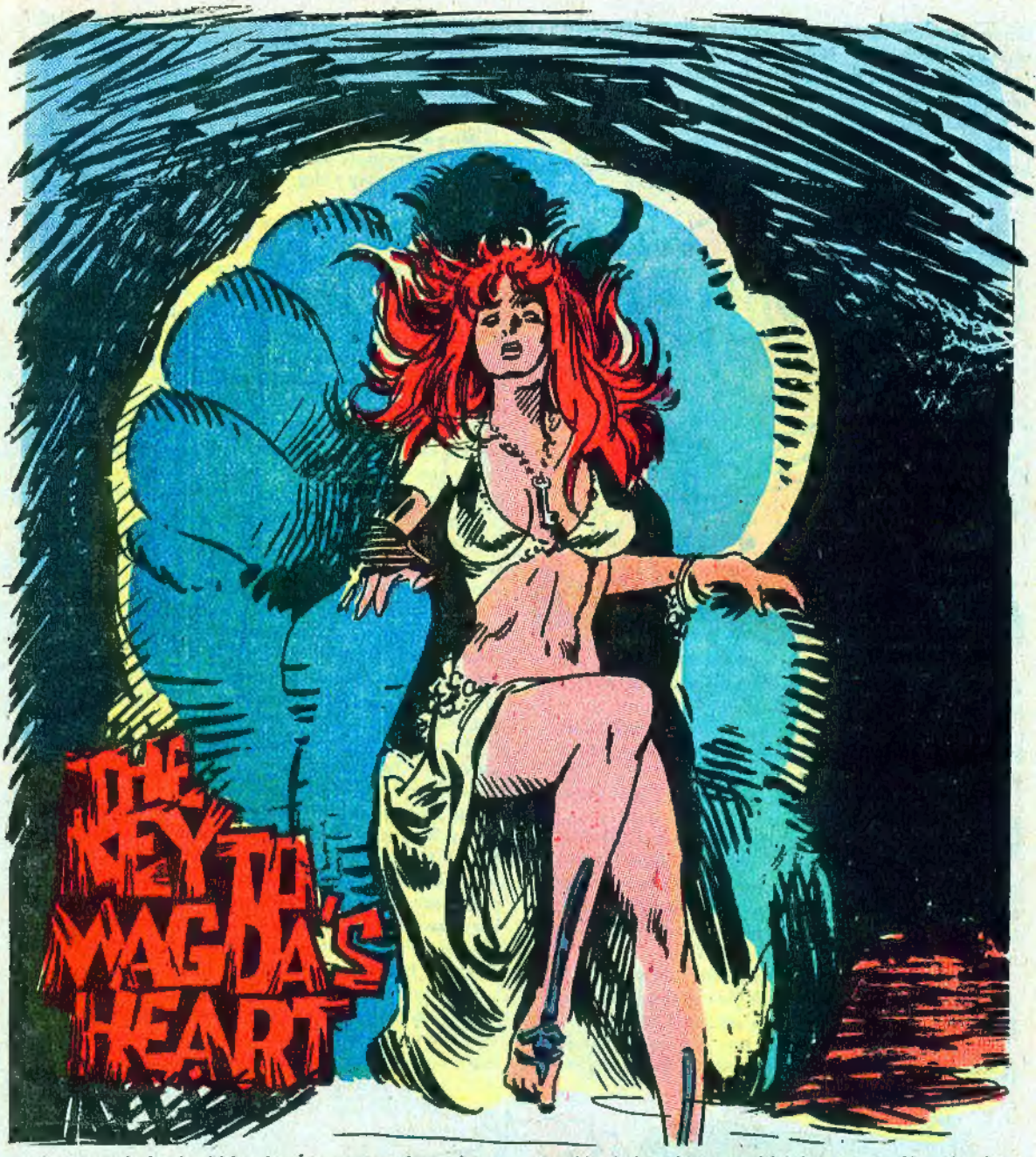

YOU DON'T HAVE TO RUN ANYMORE. I WON'T HURT YOU. ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
THANK GOD! IT WAS HORRIBLE. THAT AWFUL CREATURE KILLED FREDDY.
YOU SAW IT? YOU SAW THE WAKELY BEAST? WHERE WAS IT?
WAKELY BEAST? HOW DO YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT IT?
MY NAME IS MARTIN WAKELY. IT WAS MY GRANDFATHER WHO CREATED THE THING AND IT IS I WHO WILL DESTROY IT!
YOUR GRANDFATHER CREATED IT? BUT HOW? WHAT IS IT?
NEVER MIND ABOUT THAT NOW. SHOW ME WHERE YOU LAST SAW THE THING.
SHE BROUGHT ME TO THE SCENE OF THE CRIME. THE BLOOD IN MY VEINS BUBBLED WITH THE ANTICIPATION OF MEETING THE BEAST, BUT THE CONFRONTATION DID NOT OCCUR THEN.
THERE IS WHERE IT WAS...YOU CAN SEE IT'S FOOTPRINTS. IT TOSSED POOR FREDDY OFF THE CLIFF.

FREDDY ISN'T THERE! HE'S GONE!
THE BEAST PROBABLY CARRIED HIM OFF.
IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE STRAIN OF HER EXPERIENCE WHICH FINALLY CAUSED THE POOR GIRL TO FAINT INTO MY ARMS.
OHH!
THIS HORROR IS A NEW FEELING TO YOU. I UNDERSTAND.
SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO LIVE WITH FEAR EVERY DAY OF HER LIFE NOR DOES SHE HAVE TO BEAR THE GUILT AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR BEING A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY WHO CREATED THAT MONSTROSITY.
I BROUGHT HER TO MY HOME AND TRIED TO MAKE HER COMFORTABLE.
MARTIN!
WHERE AM I? IS IT HERE? IS THE BEAST HERE?
YOU'RE AT MY HOME... MY FAMILY HOME. IT USED TO BE KEPT HERE UNTIL IT FINALLY BROKE LOOSE.


YOU SAID THAT YOUR GRANDFATHER CREATED THAT THING.
YES, MY GRANDFATHER WAS A SCIENTIST. HE WANTED TO MAKE A CREATURE THAT WAS MORE PLANT THAN ANIMAL!
YOU SEE, THE THING SHOULD HAVE BEEN A PEACEFUL CREATURE BECAUSE IT DOES NOT NEED FOOD. LIKE PLANTS IT MANUFACTURES FOOD FROM SUNLIGHT!
WHAT HAPPENED TO IT?
ITS BRAIN... ITS PLANT-LIKE BRAIN... COULDN'T FUNCTION AS PROPERLY AS A HUMAN BRAIN. THE THING IS MAD!
YOU MEAN IT HAS CABBAGE FOR A BRAIN?
I WOULDN'T JOKE IF I WERE YOU. THE THING ALLOWED YOU TO ESCAPE WHICH MEANS THAT IT WILL BE COMING FOR YOU!
BUT IT DOESN'T KNOW WHERE I AM!
IT KNOWS! I COULD HEAR IT IN THE WOODS FOLLOWING US. BUT YOU MUST NOT BE AFRAID. I'LL PROTECT YOU FROM IT.
IT'S COMING NOW! I CAN HEAR ITS HEAVY FOOTFALLS ON THE PORCH!

OPEN THE DOOR AND THEN QUICKLY STEP ASIDE!
NOW!
KA-BLOOM!
YOU GOT HIM! I CAN SEE... BUT WAIT A MINUTE! THAT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THE PLANT THING.
OH MY GOD! IT'S FREDDY! HE WAS ONLY INJURED IN THE FALL AND NOW YOU'VE KILLED HIM!
GRAA
DO YOU SEE WHAT YOU'VE DONE? YOU'VE...
OH LORD!
6

SHE TOLD THEM THAT I WAS THE BEAST... THAT MY GRANDFATHER HAD EXPERIMENTED ON ME BUT IT'S NOT TRUE. THE UNFORTUNATE GIRL WAS CONFUSED.
I'M INNOCENT! THE PLANT BEAST IS STILL LOOSE. YOU MUST FREE ME SO THAT I CAN HUNT IT DOWN AND DESTROY IT!
I DIDN'T KILL THOSE PEOPLE. I COULDN'T HAVE.
IF I WERE THE WAKELY BEAST, IT MEANS THAT I DESTROYED MY OWN FAMILY.
I'M INNO... GRAA!
HURRY! THROW THE SWIT...
ZZITZ
KRRAAKLLE
THEY ALL RAN FROM THE ROOM SICK TO THEIR STOMACHS, NOT SO MUCH FROM THE SIGHT OF THE BEAST'S EXECUTION BUT FROM THE NOXIOUS ODOR OF BURNT VEGETABLES!
END



Christian Phelps had heard many stories about the Duchess Magda DeVille. He'd heard that her beauty was hypnotic. Men who saw her were forever under her spell. She was a siren, a succubus, an evil goddess! She was a woman no mortal man could resist.

Phelps was an author who wrote stories about ghouls, grave robbers and ghosts. He'd come to Transylvania from England to be inspired to write more of the same. He was obsessed with the supernatural. For that reason, the Duchess interested him and aroused his natural curiosity.

The villagers said that she was in league with the Devil. She'd traded her immortal soul for eternal beauty. She'd given her heart to the Devil!

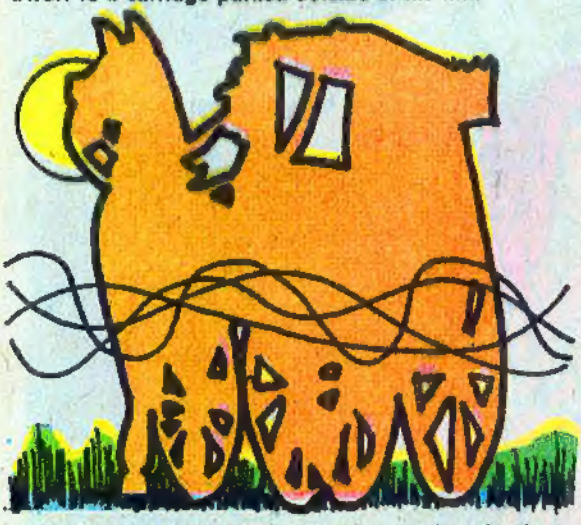
Magda DeVille was a woman without a heart! The Devil had placed it in a golden box. Around her slender neck, she wore the only key to the box that contained her own heart. If she ever fell in love and gave the key to anyone, the spell would be broken and she would lose her beauty. The Duchess was a woman who was loved, but never gave love in return. Her beauty was all that mattered. She was evil and damned! Men who visited her castle never returned.

"I'd like to visit her castle to see what the old girl really looks like," laughed Christian as he peered at the distant castle through the window of his room. "I'll bet she's a wrinkled, toothless, old hag. She's got to be at least eighty-five years old according to what I've heard."

Suddenly, there was a sharp knock at his door.

When Christian opened it, he found a dwarf standing in the hallway. "I'm a messenger from the Duchess DeVille. She's sent me to invite you to her castle. Will you come with me?"

Phelps hesitated. Was he, too, becoming superstitious? Nevertheless, his curiosity overcame his reluctance. He grabbed his coat and followed the dwarf to a carriage parked outside of his inn.



The journey to the castle was short and swift. The exterior of the edifice was dark and ominous, but the interior was gay and bright.

Christian was led into a room to meet his hostess. Her back was to him as he approached her. He expected her to be an ugly, old hag.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Phelps!" she said as she turned to reveal her face. "I've read all of your books. They're very frightening," she complimented.

The stories that he'd heard about her didn't do justice to her beauty. He refused to blink because he didn't want to block out her face — not even for a brief instant. He knew immediately that he loved her! He needed her! He could never leave her!

She was beautiful and mysterious, very mysterious. Around her neck she wore a single ornament. It was a key. Was it a golden key to a golden box?

She invited him to move into the castle for the remainder of his stay in Transylvania. He gladly and enthusiastically accepted her invitation. Magda had found a new lover. Christian was under her spell.

As the weeks passed, they became inseparable. He adored and worshipped her, but she was becoming tired of him. Soon, she would have him replaced.

"Why do you wear that key around your neck?" he asked her one night as he lay with his face against her breast while they snuggled together in front of the fireplace.

"Didn't you listen to the villagers?" she laughed. "It's the key to my heart!"

Christian's ear was pressed against her bosom and he could hear the laughter from deep inside of her body. When her laughter faded he noticed a shocking absence of sound within her breast. There was no heart beat! None! She didn't have a heart! It was then that he decided he must uncover the truth about his one, true love.

He waited until she fell asleep in his arms. Removing the key from her neck, he stole up the stairs of the castle and crept into her bed chambers. Her room was completely dark!

"My god!" he whispered as he heard the "thump - thump - thump" sounds echoing from out of the shadows. He followed the sound to its source — which was a golden box lying on her dressing table.

Slipping the key into the lock, he prayed that he wouldn't find what he knew must be inside the box. He nervously turned the key and the lid of the box snapped open. He screamed in shock and terror as his eyes beheld the living, beating, pulsating heart the box contained.

"Now, you know the truth," called Magda from the shadows. "You think you love me. You don't know me. Look upon the face of your beloved!"

She stepped out of the darkness to reveal herself to him. A face more hideous than any he'd ever beheld in his worst nightmare confronted him.

Christian shrieked. Holding the box that contained her heart, he backed towards the balcony, warning her to keep away, he stepped backwards until he tumbled over the railing. He fell to his death holding Magda's heart in his hands.

She clawed at her breast and cursed the god that made her. Her wrinkled skin shriveled up and her flesh and sinew turned to dust. All that remained where she'd stood was a pile of ashes!